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THE HUNGARIAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

Description

This report presents the latest available information concerning the composition, organization, strength, and political aims of the resistance movement in German-occupied Hungary.

12 January 1945

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SUMMARY

1. New information on the Hungarian resistance movement rests heavily on a recent report, which, although it cannot be immediately corroborated, appears plausible in terms of earlier intelligence on the subject.

2. The principal elements in the anti-German Hungarian underground are the "Hungarian Front" (Magyar Front or MF) and the "Hungarian Independence Movement" (Magyar Függetlenségi Mozgalom or MFM). Three minor resistance groups -- the "Students' Resistance Movement," the "Freedom Movement of Hungarian Patricts," and the "Union of the Friends of the USSR" -- cooperate with the MF and MFM under a supreme "Committee of Liberation". The "Hungarian National Independence Front" (Magyar Nemzet Függetlenségi Frontja or MNFF) appears to be less significant than it was originally believed.

3. The MF or Hungarian Front contains the parliamentary left opposition of the Horthy regime, i.e., the Smallholders' Party and the Social Democratic Party, plus the Peasant Union and the Russian-sponsored wing of the Hungarian Communist movement. Of these the Communists and the Smallholders have played the most active parts in resistance. The participation of the Social Democrats has been greatly reduced by internal division and disagreement.

4. The MFM or Hungarian Independence Movement consists of members of the former ruling groups who opposed Hungary's participation in Germany's war against the USSR and the western democracies. Its membership is tentatively estimated at something under three thousand, including former high-ranking civil servants, professors, physicians, clergymen and other white-collar workers, plus many of the unofficial "Hungarian Communists,"

5. The Hungarian resistance movement includes also the "Students' Resistance Movement," composed mainly of a Protestant youth group; the "Hungarian Patriots," a mixture of the "Hungarian Communists" and middle class elements; and the "Friends of the USSR," headed by

Geza Fekete-Penzes.

6. The activities of the IF, the MFM and the three minor resistance groups are coordinated by a "Committee of Liberation," whose president is Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, a well-known member of the Smallholders' Party, who is now facing execution in an Arrowcross prison.

7. The MNFF or Hungarian National Independence Front is a group of Hungarian emigres in Switzerland who make the unsubstantiated claim that they are only the foreign branch of a large underground movement inside German-occupied Hungary. The MNFF is not thought to play an important role in the Hungarian resistance movement.

8. No generalization can be made regarding the resistance activities of the Hungarian army. The recent anti-German activities of such generals as Miklós, János Vörös, Lajos Veress, Náday and Bakay are, however, worthy of notice.

9. The policy of the USSR toward Hungary seems to have undergone a drastic change at the time of the Szálasi putsch. Prior to 15 October 1944 there was evidence of close contact between Moscow and the anti-German Hungarian underground. Then, after the failure of Horthy's attempt to surrender on 15 October, the Russians seem to have lost interest in the Hungarian resistance movement, and all contacts between the underground and Moscow apparently ceased. In areas they have occupied, however, the Russians have made full use of the very elements which comprise the resistance movement in German-occupied Hungary. The Russians are likely to continue to sponsor these same elements after Hungarian territory has been completely cleared of the Germans.

THE HUNGARIAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Information now at hand sheds additional light on the composition, organization, and strength of the Hungarian resistance movement. According to a yet untried source[1] which, nevertheless, is characterized by a fair degree of plausibility, the principal elements in the anti-German Hungarian underground are the "Hungarian Front" (Magyar Front or MF) and the "Hungarian Independence Movement" (Magyar Függetlenségi Mozgalom or MFM). Three minor resistance groups — the "Students' Resistance Movement," the "Freedom Movement of Hungarian Patriots," and the "Union of the Friends of the USSR" -- cooperate with the MF and the MFM under a supreme "Committee of Liberation." The Hungarian National Independence Front" (Magyar Nemzet Függetlenségi Frontja)[2] appears to be less significant than it was originally believed.

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1. CID /1-47555, 18 December 1944. This source provides the basic material for this paper.
2. R & A Report No. 1113.90.

I. THE HUNGARIAN FRONT (MF)

According to the document referred to on page 1, this organization contains the parliamentary left opposition of the Horthy régime plus the radical peasants and the orthodox Communists. In other words, the group consists of the remnants of the Smallholders' Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Peasant Union, and the Russian-sponsored wing of the Hungarian Communist movement. These elements are held together by a Directorate headed by the Smallholder leader Zoltán Tildy. The other members are Árpád Szakasits (Social Democrat), Imre Kovács (Radical Peasant) and Gyula Kállay (Communist), and a representative of the MFM.

The Smallholders play a very active role in the MF. Besides Tildy, their principal leaders are Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky (now under arrest),[1] Count Gyula Dessewffy, editor of the banned peasant daily Kis Ujság, and Ferenc Nagy, founder of the defunct "Peasants' Union." These men are maintaining contact with their peasant follwers in the provinces, but their main strength is said to be in Budapest, where they have an important following among the middle classes. The political credo of the Smallholders is based upon the safeguarding of Hungarian independence, the building up of friendly relations with the USSR, and the cultivation of existing ties with the democratic west.[2]

The Social Democrats are said to play a rather passive role in the MF. This passivity is the result of a split existing in the underground remnants of the Social Democratic Party. A majority group, under Árpád Szakasits (former editor of the Socialist daily Népszava) has managed to maintain much of the party organization and discipline by conspiring with the employers and by placing former Trade Union activists in the Arrowcross-controlled Labor Councils. A minority group under Géza Malasits (a former Socialist member of Parliament, now in hiding in Győr) has remained aloof from the MF, views the Fascistic Labor Councils with complete indifference, and objects to cooperation with elements (the MFM),

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1. R & A Report No. 1113.90.
2. R & A Report No. 2418: The Problems of Post-War Hungary (Chapter II,1).

who "betrayed Hungary on 19 March (1944)" when the former ruling group allowed the Germans to occupy the country without offering any resistance. This minority group argues that there is no point in risking resistance, since the victory of the United Nations will sweep the Social Democratic Party into power in any case. There is reason to believe, however, that the passivity of the Social Democrats, especially that of the Malasits faction, is a result of the fact that, following the precedent of 1919, the dynamic elements of the party have gone over to the Communist movement. Both factions nevertheless agree in the view that friendship with the democratic west in the bulwark of Hungary's independent national existence.

The radical peasants, who are the remnants of the outlawed "Peasant Union", represent the landless and destitute agrarian proletariat. Their leader in the IF, Imre Kovács (a member of the group of radical young intellectuals known as "village researchers"), is to the left of the Smallholders' leaders and tends to work in terms of a separate radical peasant party. This political group may be identical with the so-called "National Peasant Party", which is represented in the Russian-sponsored Debrecen government by Minister of the Interior Ferenc Erdei.[1]

Information regarding Communist participation is extremely scanty, being principally limited to the source mentioned on page 1 (footnote 1). According to this report, the Communists are the most active and the best organized component of the IF. This is due in part to their long experience in illegal political organization and in part to the superior training of the Communist chiefs. Few people know who the real Communist leaders are; Gyula Kallay, the Communist representative in the IF Directorate, is a lesser man, who may be risked in an open position. Communist strength is expected to increase once the controls now maintained by the Germans and their Arrowcross protégés have been removed; at the present time, however, the Communists are weakened because of an internal division existing in their ranks. Actually there are two

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1. Cf. R & A Report No. 2797: The Soviet-Sponsored Hungarian Government.

illegal Communist parties: the orthodox, Moscow-sponsored Communist group, which cooperates with the NF; and the so-called "Hungarian Communist" movement, which does not. Inside the former group there are three factions, led respectively by József Madzsar (a former Communist refugee who returned to Hungary after the German occupation on 19 March 1944), Mátyás Rákosi (who spent fifteen years in prison in Hungary because of participation in the Béla Kun dictatorship and is now in Moscow), and Miklós Somogyi, a political newcomer. The Madzsar and Rákosi factions are said to have as their aim the incorporation of Hungary in the USSR as a constituent Soviet republic (although they cannot openly advocate this objective); the Somogyi group opposes the incorporation of Hungary in the Soviet Union but stands for close co-operation with Moscow.

The unofficial "Hungarian Communist Party" was organized in the fall of 1944 and draws its membership mainly from the ranks of the Social Democrats. The leader of the party is a certain Dudás, who was in Moscow recently on behalf of the resistance movement, and who claims that his group numbers 30,000 members in Budapest alone. It is said that during a recent strike the Hungarian Communists were able to call out 10,000 workers. Many of the "Hungarian Communists" are not Communists in the political-economic sense of the word but rather radical socialists who have come to identify Communism with effective resistance to Nazi domination -- German and Hungarian. The official Communist Party in Hungary, which is represented in the Directorate of the NF, refuses to recognize the "Hungarian Communists" supposedly in pursuance of orders from Moscow. The fact that the latter have not been admitted into the NF may be a result of this political rejection. The main objection to the "Hungarian Communists" seems to lie in their equivocal and undecided program. In the event that Hungary receives support from the Western democracies, they plan to stand for an independent Hungarian state, for rejection of dictation by Moscow, for cooperation with bourgeois elements, and for social reform consisting of a harmonious

blend of democratization and communization. In the event, however, that the USSR exercises a free hand in Hungary, they probably intend to accept the orthodox Communist program and carry out the decisions of Moscow as regards Hungary.

As to the relative strength of the two Communist factions in Hungary, it is estimated that the orthodox comprise only about 20 percent of the total. Kállay, the orthodox Communist member of the MF Directorate, is said theoretically to represent both factions. Certain Communist leaders had been received by Horthy before he was deposed by the Germans on 16 October 1944.

II. THE HUNGARIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT (MFM)

In contrast with the MF, which is an agglomeration of the left opposition, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary, of the Horthy regime, the MFM is reported to be an organization consisting of sincerely patriotic members of the former ruling group who did not wish to extend Hungarian-German collaboration to military participation in Germany's war. After Prime Minister Teleki's suicide on 3 April 1941, these elements were swept along with the rest of the ruling group until 19 March 1944, when the Germans occupied Hungary to prevent Prime Minister Kállay and his associates from making a separate peace with the Allies. At that time the men who now comprise the MFM leadership constituted themselves as a "respectable underground" and almost succeeded in regaining the upper hand under the short-lived premiership of General Lakatos (29 August - 16 October 1944). When, on the latter date, the Germans set up an Arrowcross dictatorship in Budapest, the MFM leaders sought and established cooperation with their former political opponents who had in the meantime grouped themselves around the MF.

The MFM is said to number approximately 2,700 people, of whom about 600 are in Budapest. Nearly 90 percent of these individuals are former high-ranking civil servants, professors, physicians, clergymen, and other white-collar workers. This 90 percent is reputed to constitute the "general staff" of the resistance movement. Their control group

is a Secretariat composed of fifty to sixty persons, headed by three secretaries. The first of these secretaries is Dr. Géza Soós, a former official of the Cultural Relations Division of the Foreign Ministry. The other two secretaryships are held by non-MFM men: Colonel Bálint Arany represents the MF; István Bognár, a member of the "Hungarian Communist Party," is general secretary for all Communists. Another important MFM leader is Domokos Szent-Iványi, a former assistant of Prime Minister Teleki at the University of Budapest, then a member of the Hungarian Foreign Service (stationed in Washington and Chicago), and finally Teleki's secretary in the Prime Minister's office.

Under the Secretariat the rank and file of the MFM is organized in sections. While the orthodox Communists are associated with the MF, most of the "Hungarian Communists" work with the MFM. Thus the so-called Györffy Group, which is a radical youth movement affiliated with the "Hungarian Communists" is incorporated in the resistance movement as a section of the MFM.

III. MINOR RESISTANCE GROUPS

In addition to the MF and the MFM, the Hungarian resistance movement is said to include three minor groups. These are the "Students' Resistance Movement," the "Freedom Movement of Hungarian Patriots," and the "Union of the Friends of the USSR." The kernel of the students' organization is the Protestant youth group, Soli Deo Gloria. Two-thirds of the members are MFM people; the remaining one-third is under Communist control. The leader of this group is a certain József Gyenes. The "Hungarian Patriots" are a mixture of "Hungarian Communist" and middle-class elements. The latter are led by a certain Miklós Csomoss. Nothing is reported of the "Friends of the USSR," except that they are headed by Géza Fekete-Pénzes.

IV. THE COMMITTEE OF LIBERATION

In order to coordinate the activities of the MF, the MFM, and the three minor resistance groups, a "Committee of Liberation" has been formed. This body contains representatives of all the resistance groups. Its president is Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, who is now facing execution in an

Arrowcross prison.[1] In Bajcsy-Zsilinszky's absence, the vice-chairman, Janos Csorba, a Smallholder member of Parliament and a lawyer by profession, has been acting as presiding officer.

V. THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE FRONT (HNFF)

For quite some time now the HNFF has been the only known Hungarian resistance group, probably as a result of the propaganda disseminated by a small group of Hungarian emigres in Switzerland. It now appears, however, that the claims of this group to be but a foreign branch of a large underground movement inside German-occupied Hungary are in the main baseless, although it is quite possible that some HNFF members are active in Hungary. The membership in Switzerland is said to include Dr. Tibor Hofmann, Edmund Ferenczi, Professor Károly Kerényi (the famous Hungarian Hellenist), Dr. Kálmán Eisenberg, and a certain Balaban.[2] The names which appear in the Swiss publications[3] of this group (Szönyi, Nészély, Szebenyi, Hajdu, etc.) are probably pseudonyms. The main difference between the HNFF and the resistance groups controlled by the "Committee of Liberation" in German-occupied Hungary lies in the composition of the HNFF. On the basis of the monthly publications of this group, which are issued in Switzerland, it appears that the membership of the HNFF is recruited mainly from, or is dominated by, the Hungarian emigrants of 1919. Having lived outside Hungary for the past quarter of a century, these emigrants appear emotionally unable to follow the rightward shift of Hungarian politics. Under the influence of their personal experiences of 1919-1920, they still tend to view Horthy as the worst personification of antidemocratic and antisemitic reaction. Their calculations do not take into account the process of gradual Nazification which has been in progress in Hungary since 1938, and which has produced a new Hungarian rightist reaction, far more extreme than that represented by Horthy.

Another important fact about the HNFF is that, in contrast with the other resistance groups, it appears to be unacceptable to certain groups, as has been shown by the reluctance of the Hungarian dissident diplomats

1. R & A Report No. 1113,90.
2. CID #L-48006, 10 January 1945.
3. Magyar Nemzet Függetlenségi Frontja Közlemenyei (17 numbers up to

time, in the opinion of the same source, only about one-third of the rank and file of the Army are prepared to deal with the Russians, and then only if worst comes to worst. In other words, this source, who himself is probably a Hungarian officer of non-German descent, being unable to present positive evidence for the Army's participation in the resistance movement, seems to evade the issue by emphasizing the pro-Nazi records of Hungarian general officers of German descent.

VII. THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT AND THE USSR

The policy of the USSR toward Hungary seems to have undergone a drastic change at the time of the Szálasi putsch. Before 15 October 1944, the Russians appeared to be willing to deal with the anti-German Hungarian underground, and even sent Hungarian Communists to Budapest after the inauguration of the Sztójay government (23 March 1944) to organize the Communist resistance. In September 1944 a delegation of the resistance movement, consisting of two Communists (Faust and Dudás) and a certain Baron Atzel, was received in Moscow. This mission was followed by another in late September, composed of General Faragho and Szent-Iványi, who were also well-received in Moscow. The terms of surrender with which the Russians presented these two delegations, are said to have been extremely reasonable; in fact a promise was made that Hungary would not be reduced to her pre-Munich (Trianon) frontiers.

After 15 October 1944, when Horthy's attempt to surrender failed, the Russians apparently lost all interest in the Hungarian resistance movement. All attempts to establish contact with the Russians miscarried. A third mission, composed of Major Simonffy-Tóth, Captain Tibor Veres, and a certain József Török, which was sent to Russian-occupied Szeged with the plan of the defenses of Budapest, disappeared without leaving a trace. No reply was received to the offer of the underground to start an uprising in Budapest. In fact, Hungarian military units, attempting to desert to the Russians, were fired upon by the latter and were compelled to return to the German lines. The Communists continued to maintain contact with Moscow until November; after that, however, even they were cut adrift.

There are two explanations for the existence of this state of affairs. Either the Russians decided after 16 October 1944 that the Hungarian resistance movement could not effect the overthrow of the pro-Nazi government and was consequently not worth wasting time on; or poor teamwork between Russian political and military authorities interfered with the maintenance of communications between Moscow and Budapest after the appearance of the Red Army on Hungarian soil. It is quite possible also that these two circumstances had a concurrent effect on the relations of the resistance movement with the USSR. This assumption is corroborated by the fact that behind the advancing front line the Russians have made full use of the very same elements which compromise the resistance movement in German-occupied Hungary and that the new Soviet-sponsored Provisional Government in Debrecen is actually a coalition of the various resistance elements, from right to left. It appears likely that the Russians will continue to sponsor these same elements after the whole of Hungarian territory has been wrested from the Germans.